

Message Text

SECRET

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, KS, JA, US
SUBJC MARINE AMPHIBIOUS FORCE LANDING EXERCISE (MAFLEX) NEAR
KWANGNUNG

1. EVERY TWO YEARS THE MARINES CONDUCT A LARGE SCALE
LANDING EXERCISE IN KOREA. THIS YEAR THE CHIEF OF NAVAL
FORCES KOREA AND THE CINC OF FLEET MARINE FORCES PACIFIC
HAVE SOUGHT OUR APPROVAL FOR AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION
SEPTEMBER 25 THROUGH OCTOBER 18 WHICH WILL BE LARGER AND
FURTHER NORTH THAN ANY CONDUCTED IN KOREA HERETOFORE.

2. THE EXERCISE IS TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH THE AVAILABILITY
OF EXTRA SHIPPING IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC WHEN THE
AMPHIBIOUS SQUADRON ASSIGNED TO THE WESTERN PACIFIC IS
RELIEVED BY A NEW SQUADRON FROM THE US. THIS WILL PERMIT
A FOUR BATTALION-SIZE EXERCISE FOR THE FIRST TIME, WHICH
THE MARINES VALUE VERY HIGHLY.

3. IN PREVIOUS YEARS THESE EXERCISES HAVE BEEN HELD IN
THE POHANG AREA, WHICH HAS THE DUAL ADVANTAGES OF BEING
REMOTE FROM THE DMZ AND HAVING A POPULATION OF
FISHERMEN WHICH HAS BECOME ADJUSTED TO HAVING THE
MARINES CHARGE THROUGH THEIR FISHING NETS ON THE

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PAGE 02 SEOUL 01695 021705Z

WAY TO THE SURF. THE ROK MILITARY COUNTS THE LATTER
TO BE A PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT BENEFIT, BUT HAS,
ACCORDING TO UNC, ACQUIESCED IN THE CHANGE OF THE
EXERCISE LOCALE TO KWANGNUNG. THE POHANG AREA HAS
THE DISTINCT DISADVANTAGE OF FORCING A FOUR BATTALLION-
SIZE FORCE OF MARINES TO LAND ON SEVERAL SEPARATE BEACHES
AND TO CONDUCT THEIR INLAND THRUSTS SEPARATELY, OVER

TERRAIN WHICH DOES NOT FAVOR COORDINATED MANEUVERS.

4. THE KWANGNUNG AREA IS, ACCORDING TO UNC, IDEAL FOR A FOUR BATTALION-SIZE EXERCISE, HAVING NONE OF THE PHYSICAL RESTRICTIONS WHICH HAMPER COORDINATED OPERATIONS AT POHANG. ITS PRIMARY DISADVANTAGE IS ITS PROPINQUITY TO THE DMZ -- 40 KILOMETERS BETWEEN THE PROPOSED NORTHERN LIMIT OF AIR OPERATIONS AND THE DMZ. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE DANGER OF SOMEONE ACCIDENTALLY STRAYING ACROSS THE DMZ IN AN AIRPLANE AND PROPOSE TO EXAMINE VERY CAREFULLY THE PROCEDURES WHICH ARE PROPOSED TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING. UNC HAS ASSURED US THAT EVERYONE IN THE LOOP HAS SHOWN FULL AWARENESS OF THIS DANGER AND HAS GIVEN UNCATEGORICAL ASSURANCES THAT THE COMMAND AND CONTROL PROCEDURES WHICH WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR THIS EXERCISE WILL PREVENT SUCH AN OCCURRENCE.

5. WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THESE ASSURANCES, BUT HAVE GIVEN OUR APPROVAL FOR CONTINUED PLANNING FOR THIS EXERCISE ONLY ON THE CONDITIONS THAT THERE BE A FURTHER REVIEW OF POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE SITES AND THAT THE EMBASSY WILL HAVE TO REVIEW AND APPROVE THE PROCEDURES FOR AVOIDING AN ACCIDENTAL INTRUSION INTO NORTH KOREAN AIRSPACE OR CLAIMED WATERS.

6. DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE AWARE THAT THIS LARGER SCALE
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PAGE 03 SEOUL 01695 021705Z

EXERCISE IS BEING PLANNED AND THAT WE SEE CERTAIN SUBSTANTIAL BENEFITS TO IT DURING THIS YEAR, IN TERMS OF OFFSETTING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE US IS WITHDRAWING FROM NORTHEAST ASIA AND IN TERMS OF UNDERSCORING THE ROLE OF THE MARINES STATIONED AT OKINAWA AND KWAKUNI IN THE DEFENSE OF KOREA. AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE AWARE OF THE NEED TO AVOID AN INCIDENT AND WILL CONTINUE TO EXAMINE THE PLANNING CLOSELY TO THIS END.
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